



**House Speaker  
Armond Budish**

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## **House Approves Measure to Strengthen Ohio's Telecommunications Industry**

*Bill updates telecom laws for anticipated job growth, while protecting consumers*

COLUMBUS – With bipartisan support, the Ohio House today approved a bill that modernizes Ohio's telecommunications laws and strengthens the likelihood for industry investments and job growth in our state. The bill also maintains several critical consumer protections for Ohioans. Amended House Bill 276, sponsored by State Rep. Allan Sayre (D-Dover), was voted out of the House unanimously, 93-0.

"This bill provides needed modernization of Ohio telecommunications laws to promote long-term economic growth," said House Speaker Armond Budish (D-Beachwood). "It also ensures that important consumer protections are preserved."

The bill addresses the regulatory imbalance between traditional phone services and mobile and internet-based phone services, and modifies Ohio's telecommunications laws to adjust to a rapidly changing market. This bill levels the regulatory playing field between service providers and gives Ohio a competitive advantage to compete for industry investments.

"This bill recognizes the impact that competitive market forces have had and will continue to have in the telecommunications industry," said State Rep. Allan Sayre (D-Dover) who sponsored the bill. "It also encourages significant investments in Ohio's infrastructure and makes our state attractive to the telecommunications jobs of the future."

The bill also maintains all current consumer protections for basic phone service users. And it adds a new phone service option for those that do not have access to phone services such as laid-off workers, veterans, domestic violence victims, homeless, families choosing between heat and phone, foster children and migrant workers.

"It is critically important to protect consumers as we work to update Ohio's telecommunications laws," said State Rep. Tim DeGeeter, Chair of the House Public Utilities Commission. "This bill received numerous hearings and had a tremendous amount of input from all sides. I am pleased that we were able to find common ground and pass a bill that balances the need to create jobs with the importance of protecting Ohio consumers."

One such provision is the establishment of a Community Voicemail service, which provides an opportunity to connect individuals with prospective employers and landlords. It is a new feature that will provide assistance to some of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens who don't have access to phone service. The program involves a free call-in voicemail box that is available to anyone with access to a touch-tone phone.